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**Faculty of Veterinary Science
Onderstepoort
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Collaborative project on Elephant Bull Vasectomies

Elephant overpopulation in wildlife parks and reserves in Africa is a growing problem and can have devastating effects on the natural landscape and other species. Because no proven method of permanent contraception currently exists for elephants, wildlife officials in many countries are considering killing herds of elephants in order to control the population growth. In July 2004, a group of veterinarians from the United States, performed the first ever sterilization of free ranging female elephants. In 2005, this group began its work with bull elephants and started developing laparoscopic vasectomy techniques for sterilizing males in the wild. The team's work has resulted in the creation of a new surgical procedure and device that effectively sterilizes male elephants with little trauma or side effects.

Elephant overpopulation is a problem in Southern Africa and is a major concern because of habitat destruction. It is important therefore to utilize every kind of technology and tool available to us to address conservation and wildlife issues, especially the novel approach first suggested by Dr Mark Stetter, adapted from equine laparoscopic procedures used by Dr. Dean Hendrickson, and supported by anaesthetic protocols developed by Dr. Jeff Zuba.

A fair number of bull elephants have had the laparoscopic procedure done since 2006, assisted by surgeons from the Faculty of Veterinary Science. The vasectomy effectively sterilizes the bull elephants while maintaining normal hormone levels and normal elephant social behaviour. Wildlife scientists and rangers used telemetry tracking collars placed on the elephants during the procedure, to closely monitor the animals and ensure there are no post-operative complications. All bull elephants that have had this procedure have fully recovered and shown no side effects from the procedure.

This is an international collaborative project that brings together conservations groups, universities and private industry to address this complex problem. These organizations include: Disney's Animal Programs, Colorado State University, the Zoological Society of San Diego, University of Pretoria – Onderstepoort, the Karl Storz Company and Catchco Africa Specialized Wildlife Capture. Together, their vision and persistence are making laparoscopic elephant vasectomies an effective tool in controlling and managing elephant populations and have reduced the need for culling.

The University of Pretoria is proud to be associated with these institutions and their dedicated teams, and looks forward to future collaboration on this project.

Yours sincerely,

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